

THE DIRECTOR OF
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

National Intelligence Council

20 July 1984

NOTE FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Herbert E. Meyer
VC/NIC

RE: Harry Cochran on Prospects in Bolivia

Harry is relatively sanguine about the prospects for a Cuban-Soviet power play in Bolivia between now and November. Harry is also sanguine about the possibility of a Soviet-engineered "October Surprise" anywhere else, as he explains in paragraphs 4-6.



Herbert E. Meyer

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20 July 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM : Harry C. Cochran
Special Assistant for Warning

SUBJECT : An "October Surprise" in Bolivia?

1. A Cuban-Soviet power play in Bolivia before the U.S. elections in November is unlikely for two principal reasons:

(a) Cuban activities directed toward building a paramilitary force composed of INRI and other leftist militants capable of executing a successful takeover have not yet reached the point where the Cubans and Soviets would be prepared to risk a coup attempt. Bolivia presents a typical case of Cuban-Soviet opportunism in exploiting openings to expand their political influence and install a network for infiltration and subversion. This effort, however, has been under way for less than two years, and it appears to be far from ready to launch a bid for power.

(b) Soviet and Cuban political strategy in Bolivia--as in other countries in South and Central America--is oriented more toward a gradual, long-term program of revolutionary politics than toward high-risk, spectacular attempts to seize power in the near term. Havana and Moscow, of course, would not hesitate to capitalize on any "revolutionary situation" that might appear, provided they had effective assets in place--as was the case in Nicaragua in 1978-79. But they do not appear to believe that Bolivia is now ripe for direct action. The Cubans may be more inclined than the Soviets to exploit even marginal opportunities for advance. The Soviet leadership, under the cautious and canny guidance of Chernenko, Gromyko, and Ustinov are engaged in a subtle, patient design to expand Soviet influence in the U.S. sphere of influence in Latin America. They believe long-term political, social, and economic trends in the hemisphere are working to their advantage, but they are fully aware of American sensitivity, particularly under the Reagan Administration, to any bold and blatant attempts to establish "another Cuba" in Latin America. The Soviets have absorbed the lessons of Grenada--an experience that has reinforced their caution to avoid confronting the U.S. with an unambiguous challenge in its own backyard.

2. I am not qualified to make confident judgments on the Byzantine intricacies of Bolivian politics, and the A/NIO/LA has advised me that there are large gaps in our knowledge of political dynamics in La Paz, including the genesis of the aborted coup and the abduction of President Siles Zuazo on 30 June. I have the impression, however, that political and economic conditions still fall well short of the kind of "revolutionary situation" that would encourage the Cubans and Soviets to risk a takeover attempt. It is only prudent to assume that, in the aftermath of the

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events of 30 June, the Siles government may be more vulnerable to infiltration and subversion by Cuban and Soviet bloc agents. The elected government, moreover, has been weakened by several coup plots and a deteriorating economic crisis. The Cubans and Soviets, however, almost certainly recognize that any moves to overthrow the government and install a leftist regime headed by politicians under Cuban influence or control would precipitate immediate intervention by the armed forces. The army would establish another military regime that would purge leftists from the government and ban leftist political parties. The powerful deterrent represented by the certain prospect of military intervention has been illustrated by the unwillingness of Juan Lechin, the veteran chief of the formidable Bolivian Workers Central, to attempt to overthrow the Siles government. Lechin knows that such a move would trigger a military takeover that would destroy his union's rights and freedoms.

3. I believe the likelihood of a military coup prompted either by ominous gains by leftists under Cuban and/or Soviet influence or by frightened middle classes in the face of looming economic collapse is substantially greater than a coup attempt by the left. There is a good chance that President Siles himself will move to preempt power plays by either the left or the military by declaring a state of siege that would empower him to enforce economic stabilization measures and neutralize a leftist threat. [redacted] seems confident that the armed forces retain the ability to block any radical leftist attempt to oust the Siles government. [redacted] judges that 90 percent of the armed forces is strongly anti-Communist. [redacted] estimates that leftists number no more than 5 percent in the Bolivian officer corps.

4. One final comment on Soviet perceptions and intentions. The possibility of a Soviet-engineered "October surprise" contrived to embarrass the Administration and damage President Reagan's reelection prospects obviously requires the most careful attention. I outlined my views four months ago [redacted]

[redacted] and I will give you an update of this paper in the next few days. This reexamination of Moscow's behavior and intentions has led me to accord greater weight to the constraints on Soviet freedom of action and risk-taking than I discerned in my March memorandum. Aside from these constraints, I am now inclined to be more skeptical that the Soviets will go beyond political warfare initiatives in their efforts to discredit Administration policies. For example, I continue to believe that Moscow's 29 June maneuver to elicit a U.S. rejection of the proposal for negotiations in September on an agreement to "prevent the militarization of outer space" will be followed in the next three months by an ostensibly constructive proposal for a conference of four or five nuclear powers to consider a new Soviet arms control formula that will combine INF and strategic weapons.

5. Apart from my judgment that Bolivia does not offer a promising target for an "October surprise," I believe there are sound reasons to be cautious in assuming that the Soviets are in a defiant and angry mood that will impel them to undertake provocative moves to impair the President's prospects in November. They seem to be proceeding on the assumption that they will have to deal with President Reagan

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for another four years. Moreover, their thinly disguised anxieties about their domestic situation and their insoluble imperial problems in Eastern Europe will impose powerful restraints on maneuvers to challenge and embarrass the Administration.

6. At the same time, however, I question the soundness of assessments such as The Economist's complacent judgment last month that "Russia has for the time being rolled itself up into a prickly ball" and that the bear is "hibernating." The notion that the Soviets' defeat on INF has caused them to "retreat into themselves," in my view, is both incautious and inaccurate. It would be imprudent to underestimate Soviet political resourcefulness and the strength of their confidence that growing "contradictions" between capitalist powers will afford them greater latitude for Soviet political warfare and yield stronger international leverage in the next few years.

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